

REMARKS

Claims 1 through 20 are presented for examination. Claims 1, 3, 5, 8 through 10, 12, 14, and 16 through 18 have been amended to even more succinctly define the invention and/or to improve their form. Claim 19 and 20 have been added to assure Applicants of the full measure of protection to which they deem themselves entitled.. Claims 1 and 10 are the only independent claims pending in the application.

Claims 1 through 18 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent 6,278,853 (Ban, et al.). With regard to the claims as currently amended, this rejection is respectfully traversed.

Independent Claim 1 as currently amended is directed to a cleaning method for cleaning a developer container. According to the method, air is blown through an opening formed in the developer container at a first flow rate and air is sucked from the developer container at a second flow rate larger than the first flow rate to suck developer in the developer container. The blowing and the sucking are concurrently carried out through an opening formed in the developer container while ambient air is flowing into the developer container through an ambient air inlet.

Independent Claim 10 as currently amended is directed to a recycling method to recycle a developer container. According to the method, first and second used sealing members that seal first and second openings, respectively, provided in the developer container are removed. Air is blown into the developing container at a first flow rate and air sucked from the developer container at a second flow rate larger than the first flow rate to suck developer from the developer container to clean the developer container. The developer container is filled with developer and first and second new sealing members are

mounted to seal the first and second openings. The blowing and the sucking are concurrently carried out through the first opening while ambient air is flowing into the developer container through the second opening.

In Applicant's view, Ban et al. discloses a recycling method for a toner supply container that is detachably mountable to a main assembly of an image forming apparatus to supply toner into the main assembly. According to the method, a toner supply container has a filling opening to fill the toner and a supply opening to supply the toner. A first seal member seals the filling opening and a second seal member seals the supply opening. The first and second seal members are dismounted from the toner supply container. The inside of the toner supply container is cleaned by blowing air into the toner supply container through either one of the filling opening and the supply opening and simultaneously sucking the air through the other one of the openings. The toner is then filled through the filler opening.

According to the invention of Claims 1 and 10, the blowing and sucking steps are concurrently carried out through one opening while the ambient air flows into the developer container through an ambient air inlet or second opening. Advantageously, the use of one opening for the blowing and the sucking makes it substantially easier to set the blowing device and the sucking device in place so that a substantially shorter time is required for cleaning the developer container.

Ban et al. may teach blowing air and sucking air simultaneously. In Ban, however, an air suction device is set in an opening formed in one longitudinal end of a toner container and an air blowing nozzle is inserted into an opening formed in the other longitudinal end of the container. The toner container is then cleaned by operating the

suction device and the blowing device from opposite ends of the container. In contrast to Ban et al., it is a feature of Claims 1 and 10 that the blowing and sucking are carried out concurrently through a common opening while ambient air is flowing into the container through an ambient air inlet or a second opening. Accordingly, it is not seen that Ban et al.'s simultaneous air blowing and sucking through different openings at opposite ends of a container could possibly teach or suggest the feature of Claims 1 and 10 of concurrent blowing and sucking through a common opening while air is flowing into a developer container through another opening. It is therefore believed that Claims 1 and 10 as currently amended are completely distinguished from Ban et al. and are allowable.


A review of the other art of record has failed to reveal anything which, in Applicants' opinion, would remedy the deficiencies of the art discussed above, as references against the independent claims herein. Those claims are therefore believed patentable over the art of record. Applicants submit that the amendments to independent Claims 1 and 10 clarify Applicants' invention and serve to reduce any issues for appeal.

The other claims in this application are each dependent from one or another of the independent claims discussed above and are therefore believed patentable for the same reasons. Since each dependent claim is also deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, however, the individual consideration or reconsideration, as the case may be, of the patentability of each on its own merits is respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request favorable consideration and reconsideration and early passage to issue of the present application. The Examiner is respectfully requested to enter this Amendment After Final Action under 37 C.F.R. § 1.116.

Applicants' attorney, William M. Wannisky, may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our New York office at the address shown below.

Respectfully submitted,



Attorney for Applicants
Jack S. Cubert
Registration No. 24,245

FITZPATRICK, CELLA, HARPER & SCINTO
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, New York 10112-3800
Facsimile: (212) 212-2200

WMW/JSC/dc

DC_MAIN 163026v1